United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/953
14 August 1991

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General meets emissaries from Israeli Government in Geneva, who say they will consider release of Arab detainees only if they get evidence of fate of seven Israeli soldiers missing in Lebanon.

- United Nations inspection team reports on Iraq's biological capacity; finds no evidence of current stocks.

- Algeria expresses "deep regret" over recent resumption of military operations in Western Sahara.

- United Nations mission to Iran concludes that reconstruction of physical infrastructure, damaged in that country during Iran-Iraq conflict, will be costly and lengthy.

- First United Nations Development Programme field office in Albania inaugurated in capital city of Tirana.

- Third round of preparations for 1992 Conference on Environment and Development begins in Geneva.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar met today in Geneva with Israeli officials as he continued his efforts to free detainees in the Middle East.

Following the meeting a Geneva-based United Nations press officer reported that the Secretary-General, told a press conference that he had received strong support from the Israeli Government, which had reiterated its position however that it would consider release of its Arab detainees only when it had clear evidence of the fate of seven Israeli soldiers missing in Lebanon.

The Secretary-General said that the United Nations was the only channel through which Governments and groups holding hostages were communicating. "We are continuing", he said, "with renewed energy".

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For information media—not an official record

Representing the Israeli Government at the meeting were the Coordinator for Lebanese Affairs in the Israeli Defense Ministry, Uri Lubrani; Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Yohanan Bein; and Special Adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ori Slonim.

The Secretary-General met earlier today with the Ambassador of Iraq to the United Nations, Barzan Al-Tikrite, to discuss various matters of common concern, including the question of Ian Douglas Richter, the British engineer detained in Iraq.

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David Kelly, the Chief Inspector of a United Nations mission, which visited Iraq to inspect sites for biological weapons today told correspondents at Headquarters that his team had found no evidence of any biological weapons per se, or of facility for filling such weapons. However, he said, the team had discovered, at one of the sites, a capability to research, produce, test and store biological warfare agents.

The inspection team was sent to Iraq by the Special Commission on Iraqi Disarmament, set up by the Security Council's resolution 687 (1991), to verify that country's claim that it had no biological weapons nor carried out any related activities.

In a statement read out on behalf of the Special Commission, Mr. Kelly said the team, which was made up of 28 experts in microbiology and biotechnology, safety, medicine and communication, had undertaken a full five-day inspection of the Iraqi biological site near Salman Pak. It also held discussions with Iraqi authorities from the Ministries of Health and Agriculture to define a base of microbiological activities within Iraq.

According to the statement, Iraq had handed over to the team, on the last day of the visit, a collection of biological materials which could be developed as biological warfare agents. At the same time, the statement said, Iraq stated that it would cease developing biological warfare agents.

This morning's press conference was also attended by the Executive Director of the Special Commission, Ambassador Rolf Ekeus.

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Algeria has noted "with deep regret" the recent resumption of military operations in Western Sahara.

In a letter to the Secretary-General of 12 August, the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it shared the Secretary-General's profound concern for "these dangerous developments" on the eve of the entry into force -- on 6 September -- of a cease-fire accepted by both parties to the conflict.

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Algeria reiterated its full support for the Secretary-General's peace-making efforts and encouraged him "to make every effort" to prevent any military escalation.

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The reconstruction of the physical infrastructure damaged in Iran during the conflict between that country and Iraq will be a costly and lengthy process, according to a report by a United Nations mission which visited Iran in June.

Led by former Under-Secretary-General Abdulrahim Farah, the mission was to obtain initial information on the nature and extent of damage sustained by Iran as a result of the conflict with Iraq.

In a report to the Security Council, dated 31 July, the team said that as the war was fought for the most part on Iranian territory, the consequences to its population, economy and environment were enormous.

The mission was impressed by the reconstruction efforts thus far undertaken. None the less, the report stated, access to financing resources, foreign equipment and technology from the international community would be necessary in order to fully reconstruct and rehabilitate the country within a reasonable period of time.

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The first United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field office in Albania was inaugurated yesterday in the capital city of Tirana by the agency's Administrator, William H. Draper III.

Present at the inauguration were the country's Prime Minister, Ylli Bufi, other senior government officials and the newly-appointed UNDP Resident Representative to that country, Jean-Nicholas Marchal.

The UNDP was the first multilateral agency to start operations in Albania more than 15 years ago. In the past, technical assistance has ranged from computer technology to wine making. During the past year the emphasis has been on helping the country move from a centrally-planned to a market economy.

Today Albania, with an annual per capita income of $650 is the largest recipient of UNDP technical and financial support in central and eastern Europe. The UNDP is expected to provide some $5.9 million for Albania's Fifth Programming Cycle (1992-1996).

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Representatives from about 100 countries are currently gathered in Geneva for the third round of preparations for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development -- also called the Earth Summit -- to be held next summer in Brazil.

During the four-week session, which began on Monday 12 August and ends on 4 September, proposals for action that will sustain global economic growth and conserve the environment will be the focus of debate.

Participants are expected to discuss a plan of action for sustainable practices relating to land use, energy, freshwater, oceans, hazardous wastes including toxic chemicals, and forests. They will also consider proposals in areas of health, education, human settlements, food and environmental emergencies, among others.

Two previous rounds of preparations were held in Nairobi, August 1990, and in Geneva, March 1991.

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